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School of the Arts
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This is to certify that the thesis prepared by April Alison Jones entitled THE FREEDOM
QUILT has been approved by her committee as satisfactory completion of the thesis
requirement for the degree of Masters of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy.

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April 30, 2009

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THE FREEDOM QUILT

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art in Theatre Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction.....	8
Chapter	
1 From the Alpha to the Omega	
In the Beginning	9
Research	11
Filling in the Blanks.....	16
Production Values.....	20
Rehearsal	21
Performance and Audience Response.....	22
Afterthoughts.....	25
References.....	29
Appendices.....	
A The Freedom Quilt script.....	30
B Music from Sweet Honey in the Rock and the Alan Lomax Collection.....	80
C Cast list.....	81

Abstract

THE FREEDOM QUILT

By April Alison Jones, MFA

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2009

Major Director: Noreen C. Barnes
Director of Graduate Studies, Theatre

The Freedom Quilt is a play that I have written and adapted from Deborah Hokinson's book, Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt. This story explores the historic and dramatic implications in the idea of coded quilts as a form of communication among African American slaves; specifically as coded maps to freedom. There is an ongoing scholarly debate challenging the existence of these quilts, let alone that they could have been used in such a complex manner. The Freedom Quilt however, is one girl's unique and individual story, and does not in any way suggest that maps, encoded in quilts were used by a large

number of escaping slaves. I don't know if the actuality of these quilts can ever be proven one way or another, but history has revealed that there were many paths to freedom, and following a map of this kind could very well have been one of them.

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Introduction

The Freedom Quilt was presented as a staged reading in the Shafer St. Playhouse on the campus on Virginia Commonwealth University, March 20-22, 2009. In addition to writing The Freedom Quilt, I directed the reading with a cast of ten actors. I also contributed the vocal work for Clara's recorded narrative, created a thirty minute pre-show slide and audio presentation, selected all of the music for the production, and designed the flyers and postcards that were used to publicize the event.



Chapter One

From the Alpha to the Omega

In the Beginning

I first came across Deborah Hopkinson's, Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt, in 1997 while living in Charlotte, North Carolina when I was asked by the head of a local theater company if I'd be interested in adapting Hopkinson's book into a play. After reading the less than twenty paged book, with illustrations by James Ransome, I said yes, signed a contract and began to write Clara's story for the stage. For legal reasons, I am not at liberty to discuss what ultimately transpired between myself and the above mentioned theatre company, but suffice it to say that they are no longer in business. After the frustration of that experience, I packed my unfinished play about Clara and her quilt, legal papers, research and notes, into a box, and put them away. Although my relationship with that particular theatre company didn't end well I gained confidence in my ability as a playwright, and went on to pen Negras Eros, which won the Creative Loafing Theatre Award for best new play in 2003, and Telling Tales, which has yet to be produced.

In the spring of 2008 when I saw the "thesis hell" that grad students were going through, I realized that I needed to start thinking about what I would write about for my thesis the following year. After considering and discarding several ideas, I decided that I wanted to do a creative thesis project based Hopkinson's book, and my unfinished script

and call it, The Freedom Quilt. As I searched through boxes of my archived papers, I came across two, coffee stained, hard copies of early drafts with handwritten notes; which was providence, because the original file is on a floppy disk somewhere in Buffalo, New York, and I don't have a floppy disk drive. As I read both drafts, trying to figure out which copy was the most recent, I was surprised to see that I already given Clara and Annie Rae, very distinct voices. The more I read, the more excited I became, because even as I recognized that I had quite a bit of work to do I was pleased about the foundation that I had already established for the play years earlier. So I scanned my script, resurrected as The Freedom Quilt into my computer, and began work on my creative thesis project.

Even though The Freedom Quilt is an adaptation of children's book I do not necessarily consider it a children's play, because it is not written for toddlers or elementary school students in that simplistic style that is sometimes associated with children's theatre. There are some companies however, such like the Milwaukee Children's Theatre and Seattle Children's Theatre, who are sophisticated enough to understand that they don't only serve the "ankle biters," and their parents, but middle and high school students and their families as well. Hopkinson's book is geared to an audience of five to ten year olds, as is the companion piece; also illustrated by Ransome, and published in 2005 titled, Under the Quilt of Night. The play that I have written is for an audience that is at least as old as Clara, who is approximately twelve when the story begins. I do not mean to suggest that younger audiences couldn't appreciate or learn from The Freedom Quilt, but I can already hear the complaints about some of the sexual innuendo and language that I have included in this play.

Hopkinson's book tells the story of a young girl named Clara who is born into slavery on North Farm in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, and has recently been taken away from her mother and sold to Home Plantation in Liberty, to pick cotton. Clara is miserable, homesick, and not used to the demands of being a field slave. She is befriended by a young man, Jack, who works the fields, and Aunt Rachel, the maternal figure with whom she lives. Aunt Rachel is concerned that Clara will not survive the hard labor of field work so she teaches her how to sew in the hope that if she's good enough, she can transition from being a field slave to a house slave. Clara soon acquires enough skill with needle and thread to become a seamstress, leaving the cotton fields behind her. In her new role at the main house, Clara is in a position to overhear conversations, pick up rumors, and eavesdrop on school lessons. It doesn't take long before Clara hears whispers about, freedom, the Ohio River, the Big Dipper, a place called Canada where there are no slaves, and how a map could be used as a guide to freedom. One day, while she is working in the sewing room, Clara realizes that a scrap of blue fabric she is holding is shaped like the cow pond on Home Plantation, and with sudden clarity she understands not only what a map is, but how it could be used. Excited by this discovery, Clara decides to create her own map, using scraps of fabric to design a quilt that is actually a coded map to freedom.

Research

There were many sources that I found to be valuable during my research into the histories and cultures of Clara's world. There are a number of websites that focus on, or

make mention of coded quilts, slave quilts, Underground Railroad quilts, plantation quilts; and interestingly enough, African quilts. Two books that were of particular interest to me were; Hidden in Plain View : A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad, by Jaqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard, and Stitched from the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Antebellum South, by Gladys-Marie Fry. Stitching Stars: The Story Quilts of Harriet Powers, by Mary E. Lyons, provided me with a historic figure, who also reflected the woman that Clara might have been. Only two of Powers' quilts are known to have survived, one of which is housed in the Smithsonian's American History Museum, and the other is in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

Signs & Symbols by Mark O'Connell and Raje Airey is an excellent book for understanding the ways that signs and symbols have always been used as a mode of communication among human beings whether they had a written language or not. Ancient symbols like the ankh, the pentagram and the triquetra, are still used today. Masonic handshakes, talking drums, the popular nineteenth century dance the cakewalk, as well as the Navajo code talkers that were used in World War II, are further examples of how human communication has never been limited to the use of spoken or written words.

I also had to consider the history of the Underground Railroad in writing Clara's story. While Levi Coffin is often referred to as the president, and Presbyterian minister John Rankin is considered one of its most important conductors, the Underground Railroad, was more of a network than an organization, so the term is often generically applied to anyone who assisted those fleeing bondage. For instance, John Parker (Appendix A 75), who purchased his freedom when he was eighteen, was very active in

assisting runaway slaves and was also a neighbor of Rankin's, but he was not a member of any group or organization per se.

There is a lively, ongoing, scholarly debate as to whether or not coded slave quilts existed, and if they did, whether or not they were used as maps to freedom. Some of the argument seems to be based in the idea of literacy. At one point there were similar arguments made against the coded language in the music, songs and dance of enslaved Africans who were denied the right to read or write, and were therefore deemed illiterate. Calling someone illiterate however, implies intellectual inferiority, which seems to be supported by the definition given in Webster's Universal Unabridged Dictionary:

il·lit' ēr·ăte, *a.* [L. *illiteratus*, unlettered, uneducated; *in-* priv., and *litteratus*, marked with letters, educated, from *littera*, a letter.]

1. ignorant; uneducated; especially, unable to read or write.
2. having or showing limited knowledge, experience, or culture, especially in some particular field; as, he is musically *illiterate* (906).

Defining literacy can be tricky because the ability to read and write does not guarantee the ability to interpret information or communicate effectively. If there is a language barrier between two people, who is the illiterate one? Is a person's literacy based on the modes of communication of the dominant culture, or on the modes used in the familial culture of a person's daily life? The ability to read and write does not make anyone immune to ignorance or prove that they are educated, because the symbols that we use to make words are not the only symbols that can be written or read.

Christopher Densmore, curator, of the Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania and author of Red Jacket: Iroquois Diplomat and Orator has this to say about coded quilts in general:

The quilt code fits into this story as an explanation of how that information was communicated to the waiting passengers on the Underground Railroad line. The problem with the general picture is that it does not fit with the narratives of fugitive slaves, or with the accounts recorded in William Still's The Underground Railroad or with more recent scholarship, notably John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweniger's, Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation.

Most of Densmore's arguments however, focus on Tobin and Dobard's book in particular, when he writes:

The use of this quilt code as described in the book seems implausible. How many people had access to, let alone time to manufacture, the ten quilts needed to display the signals? Why use such a system at all? If people had the time and opportunity to explain the code and its usage to the potential fugitives, they also had ample opportunity to convey the information embedded in the quilts verbally with less trouble and opportunity for miscommunication that (*sic*) using the quilts.

Additional arguments taken up by Densmore and others, are that neither Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, or any of the Works Progress Administration slave narratives collected by the Federal Writers Project, make reference to coded quilts, and that it would be too difficult for the code (assuming there were only one) to be known among large groups of people. They also mention the lack of physical evidence regarding these coded

quilts. My counter arguments against these claims would be that Tubman and Douglass might not have been privy to this information, and that there were many paths to freedom such as those taken by Henry “Boxcar” Brown, who shipped himself to freedom in a crate, or Helen Craft, a light skinned slave, who dressed as a man and pretended to be her husband’s owner, thereby getting them both to freedom. Tubman and Douglass simply might have chosen not to share their knowledge publicly, or not known about this way to freedom at all. Also, if everyone knew the code, then it wouldn’t be secret, and it seems unlikely that there would only be one code. The reasons for a lack of physical evidence supported by extant coded quilts, seems obvious when their inherent rareness, age, and fragility is considered. The quality of fabric available for slave quilters would have been low, and a conscious effort to preserve them from damage, dry rot and pests as they were passed down, possibly with oral traditions would have been difficult in the least, if not improbable.

The passing of information among early African Americans had to be in part, “covertly overt”, or to borrow from the title of Tobin and Dobard’s book, “hidden in plain view.” There also must have been some difficulty in communication among captured Africans who did not speak the same language or dialect. Might these two things alone, not create some common denominator in the oral, aural and visual conversation among them and thereby elevate the importance of signs and symbols in that conversation? Might not the language of signs and symbols be passed down along among these people, along with their oral traditions?

Many slaves were highly skilled laborers, whose services were lent or hired out. They might have been blacksmiths, dressmakers, masons, iron workers, carpenters, or furniture makers. Mary Todd Lincoln's modiste, Elizabeth Keckley, was a former slave, whose sewing talents landed her in the White House. Slaves who were hired out, had more freedom of movement than the others, so it is conceivable that some of them might have acted as couriers, delivering messages or even sending codes in the rhythm of the blacksmith's hammer strike, or the placement of a mason's bricks. It has also been suggested that quilts were used to identify safe houses or danger to escaping slaves, depending on whether they were placed on a porch, clothesline in an open window, and even in the direction of how they were placed.

In Hopkinson's book, Clara is sold to Home Plantation to work in the fields. Although Hopkinson does not specify what type of work Clara will be doing, Ransome's illustrations imply that she is put to work in the cotton fields, but my research provided me with another idea. Kentucky was a leading producer of hemp in the United States, as the climate and soil were more compatible with the cultivation of hemp, than cotton or tobacco. Although these crops also contributed to the economy in Kentucky, hemp was king. So I had Clara go to work in the hemp fields, which meant I had to do a lot of research on the cultivation of this crop in America. There is quite a hemp history in the United States, and several of the founding fathers including Washington and Franklin were involved in it.

Kentucky slave owners also tended to have farms rather than the large "Gone with the Wind" type of plantations immortalized on celluloid and more common in the Deep

South. This is important to note because Clara was born and raised on a farm until she was taken from her mother and sold to a plantation. I would imagine that there is a quantifiable difference between being a slave on a farm and a slave on a plantation, and that the shock of going from the former to the latter would be a huge adjustment for anyone to make, let alone a girl of Clara's age.

Filling in the Blanks

In adapting Hopkins story, I decided to have Clara narrate; as an adult in a series of voiceovers that set the tone for the play, and act as a transitory device between scenes. I felt that incorporating voiceovers would solve two problems. First, expository information could be included in them, and since the voiceovers also signal scene changes, they provide the opportunity to incorporate music, choreography, or projections into the scene shift. Furthermore, the voiceovers allow the audience to hear Clara's story in her own words, which establishes both a sense of intimacy as well as empathy.

Some of the things that I include in my adaptation that Hopkinson does not address are; use of the word nigger, the particular sexual threat faced by Clara and other enslaved women, and the involvement of Native Americans in assisting runaways. I also amended the name of Aunt Rachel to Annie Rae. I made this change primarily because "Annie Rae" seems to be a natural blending of "Aunt Rachel" into a more affectionate and familial term of endearment. I also wanted to avoid any connection to the use of "aunt" or "auntie" in the pejorative sense as it has been used in the past regarding older black women.

Although the NAACP had an official burial of it, and the word is anathema to those who are politically correct; having replaced it with the vapid, ‘n word’, *nigger*, went viral a long time ago and is a part of American history and cannot be sterilized from the national conscience. I found it important to have both white and black characters use this expletive as a reminder that it’s still here in the twenty-first century, hanging around, being defended in the pop culture of music, slang, social networking sites where it’s dressed up as “nigga”, as well as in the mouths of racists from where it came.

It is hard to imagine the sexual threats that were unique to slave women. They were already at a double disadvantage due to gender and race, and the fact that they were property left them little recourse when confronted by the sexual peccadilloes of any man or woman, free or slave. They were forced to breed with other slaves, impregnated by their owners, and sexually assaulted for perverse pleasure. These women had no reproductive rights, or rights to the children they gave birth to, and they did not have the option of marriage. While the commitment ritual of “jumping the broom” might have been allowed for some, it did not provide any legal protection from rape, or the sale of family members.

I wanted to include the Native American presence in Clara’s story for historical accuracy, and the Shawnee were the major tribe in the area prior to the Indian Removal Act of 1830. It was also important for me to include them because; in American theatre the stories involving “people of color” are often separated. We are given the Indian story, the slave story the Chinese story, the Irish story as if they happened independently of each other, with no cultural overlap or shared experience. I tend to be doubtful of stories that claim to reflect American history, that are Eurocentric to the point of excluding all

“others”. This is especially true if we consider the genetic mixing that occurred, the resultant “one drop rule,” and how the United States is the only industrialized, western nation that uses the construct of race to categorize its population.

Stepping further away from Hopkinson’s narrative, I created new characters for Clara to interact with, and scenes that further establish the time and place of this story. I also set this play within a specific four year time period (1849-53) while Hopkinson’s book takes place in some general time during slavery. I included historic events that actually occurred during this time, but I had to be careful that it was not imposed information and could be divulged in a believable manner. Some of the historic figures and sites that I have inserted into The Freedom Quilt are John Parker, Rueben and Anna Benedict, an Indian trail known as Bullskin Trace, and the Alum Creek Settlement in Ohio. I also found ways to make mention of individuals like Delia Webster and Tecumseh, and hope to figure out how to make reference to Sojourner Truth’s 1851, “Ain’t I A Woman” speech.

It was important for me when writing this play, that I write characters that required actors and not types. I deliberately included a few roles that are meant to be cast against “type”. The actor who plays the characters Elise/White Woman for example, must “look white” although Elise is a slave. Then there is the actor who plays Elijah; a young slave, Billy; a vigilante, and, Geo Greyfeather; a Shawnee man. Although the archetypical overseer is a part of the story I have written, this is not a play about evil white people, and I tried to find a certain balance with that character, but maybe that is his role to play, in the same way that Cook is the complacent Negro, even though we know her tragic story. I tried to create individual characters interacting with one another outside of assumptions

that are often associated with ethnicity. All African Americans are not descended from kings and queens, all European Americans cannot trace their lineage back to the Pilgrims, all Native Americans are not noble and all Asian Americans are not good at math.

Production Values

I knew that music would be a major part of The Freedom Quilt, and initially intended to build a soundscape around the music of Sweet Honey in the Rock, but I was cautious about turning The Freedom Quilt into some type of pseudo musical. There were several reason why I thought of Sweet Honey in the Rock, not the least being their beautiful harmonies, (which are often a cappella and therefore allowed me some freedom regarding historical accuracy), but also because their music and this play are both driven by female energy. This is one of the reasons I decided to stage The Freedom Quilt in March, as a way to acknowledge feminine ingenuity and power during Women's History Month. Regarding the music however, I found the Alan Lomax Collection; which was purchased in 2004, by the American Folklore Center in the Library of Congress, to be of particular benefit. I was able to create an interesting balance of voices in using his collection in addition to the recordings of Sweet Honey in the Rock.

Initially I planned to incorporate projected images into the staged reading, until I realized that it would distract the audience from listening to the reading (some of the images also had text), as well as limit my ability to block the actors because of logistics regarding the placement of the projector. So I created a slide show that began shortly after the house opened, and was accompanied by music from the Lomax Collection, and Sweet

Honey in the Rock. Because this was a staged reading of The Freedom Quilt, I felt that a slide presentation could help frame the context and time of the play as well as provide at least one production value.

The slide show was a thirty minute chronology of events beginning with Africans prior to the Trans Atlantic Slave trade, continuing through the Middle Passage, with a condensed history of African Americans until the mid 1800's. It was very important to me that the images didn't begin with slavery, because that would seem to be a denial of any prior history. Images that reflected the Native American and European presence were also included in the slide show, along with slave auctions, devices that were used to punish or restrain slaves, and slave families that had clearly intermixed with the Native and European populace. The closing images in the pre-show presentation were photographs of men and women who had escaped from slavery and found freedom in Canada.

I thought that having a thirty minute pre-show for patrons who arrived when the doors opened at half hour, was a good idea, and I still do. In the future however, I would adjust the length of the slide show, because the people who attended the reading generally arrived within ten to fifteen minutes of curtain.

Rehearsal

I started recruiting actors for The Freedom Quilt while I was still working on the script, and by December of 2008, I had cast most of the roles except for Clara. I had a slight moment of panic when I received a phone call from a member of the Shafer Alliance Laboratory Theatre (SALT) board. He told me that there was a conflict with the dates that

I had requested in the Newdick Theatre, (at the Shafer Street Playhouse), for the staged reading of The Freedom Quilt. Even though I submitted the necessary forms well in advance, and had been told that thesis projects took precedence over student projects, I was getting the run around. The ultimate irony is that, after a week of back and forth with the SALT board, I was offered “concession dates,” because there were so many requests for Newdick in March, but the dates I was offered, were the dates of my original request! So, the space was confirmed, but I still needed one actor. I continued writing during the ChrismaChanuKwanazakahs break, and when classed resumed in January, I emailed the actors with a reminder that rehearsal for the reading would run on March 16-19, with performances on March 20-22. I thought that in asking for a one week commitment for rehearsal and performance, I could reduce the possibility of actors dropping out of the process, but I was wrong. After I sent the January email, a few people apologized and backed out of the reading citing forgotten conflicts or academic stress. Some people never responded to my inquiries, although they had verbally committed to the reading in the past. By February of 2009, I didn’t have a complete cast, and decided to consolidate some of the roles for the purpose of the reading, and I still needed a strong female for the role of Clara. Eventually I contacted Todd Ritter, who is on the theatre faculty at the Center for the Arts at Henrico High School, to see if he had any qualified students that I could use in my reading. Todd and I worked together at Arena Stage in Washington, DC in the late 80’s, and I’ve taught several classes at the Center for the Arts since being in graduate school. Todd told me that he had a few female students that could probably handle the reading, but he didn’t think that any of the males were strong enough. We set a time to hold auditions

during one of Todd's classes, and that's where I found the actor to play Clara. As relieved as I was to have cast that particular role, I still didn't have a full company and time seemed to be passing at light speed. I phoned, emailed and "Facebooked" people in my search for thespians for the reading, and by early March, right before Spring Break, I had a full cast. Within a week, I lost two more actors, and another one called me the day before rehearsal began to contritely back out of the reading. Luckily, I was able to replace two of the actors before rehearsals began at 6:30 PM on Monday, March, 16.

I was still short one actor on the day rehearsal began, but I literally ran down, an actor on campus that had made an earlier verbal commitment to the reading, but hadn't responded to any of my follow up inquiries regarding his current interest or availability. I may have frightened him; running up to him in the rain the way I did, or maybe I made him feel guilty about not responding to my electronic missives, but the end result was a recommitment on his part to The Freedom Quilt, and that's all that mattered. Now I had a full cast.

Performance and Audience Response

I can't complain about the reading, because it served its purpose. I was able to listen to the words I had written and visualize the theatrical possibilities of the story. I decided what worked for me and what didn't, and I was able to get feedback not only from my actors, but from audience members as well. Although I was disappointed with the low audience turnout for The Freedom Quilt, I did receive several suggestions during post show discussions that I'd like to mention.

One audience member proposed that I should craft two scripts; one that was written for a smaller touring cast, and another one written for a cast of any size. This is not a bad idea and I will take it into consideration.

It was also suggested that I add an active threat, like the one that is implied in Clara' v/o when she talks about how cautious she has to be with her quilt. "I found ways to hide the true purpose of my design, with symbols, shapes, colors; even the knots in the thread or the stitch pattern I used, I also found I had to be special careful, cause sometime folk ain't always what they seem"(Appendix A 56). This suggestion made me consider the possibility of writing a scene that Clara describes in her following voiceover; "bout a rumor goin' round that somebody in the quarters had a map. Found a book in Hannah's' cabin so they sold off her oldest boy, but they never found my quilt" (Appendix A 63). I could have the Overseer enter Annie Rae's cabin looking for the map, while she or Clara is wrapped in the quilt. This would incorporate the implied threat as action.

Another suggestion was that I include a scene with Annie Rae showing other runaways Clara's quilted map as they pursue the path to freedom. Hopkinson ends her book on that note with Clara saying, "Aunt Rachel kept her word. The quilt is there still, at Home Plantation. People go and look at it, even folks from neighboring farms. I know because some of them come and tell me how they used it to get free." (15). While this is a nice note to end a children's book on, I don't want to make it seem as though Annie Rae has some kind of runaway clearinghouse and that everyone gets to freedom.

It was brought to my attention after the reading that the use of the word "lynching" may not be appropriate to use for the time of this play (1849-53). There are several

suggestions about how the word “lynching” came into public use so the question then becomes whether or not it was a common word that Clara and other slaves would have been familiar with. According to what I was able to find the term was most likely put into use during the American Revolution, when the Justice of the Peace, in Virginia, Charles Lynch created his own brand of extralegal punishment for English Loyalists. It seems that the initial use of the word had more to do with mob law in general rather than hanging in particular, although hanging might have been a part of the mob law that was meted out. In America, lynching reached its peak in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century’s, and the word is most often associated with the lawless hanging of African Americans during this time.

I was asked if the use of the phrase, “I’m sorry for your loss” (Appendix A 65); which Annie Rae says to Jack, might not be too contemporary for the time of the play, but nothing in my research suggests that it would have been inappropriate in the 1850’s. It may be easier to remove the term lynching as well as the phrase “I’m sorry for your loss” if it is going to take the audience out of the reality of the play. Neither of these things are of major importance to the larger story so I don’t feel that either of them are worth arguing over.

While I agree that there are historical facts that might be questioned regarding coded quilts, I would also say all history facts should be questioned. History is vast, complicated, and is known to change over time, depending on who is telling the story.

Afterthoughts

I have to admit that I was surprised by the number of cast members, and acting students in the audience as well, who didn't know the difference between a reading, and a staged reading. I won't go into the difference between the two here, but it should be clear in the verbiage.

I have been rethinking the title of this piece. Maybe it should be called Clara's Quilt, because this not only gives Clara agency, but it also avoids certain assumptions that potential audience members could make based on the use of the word, freedom in the title. I have found that generally speaking, people don't want to see another "slave play".

It had always been my intention to limit the cast size of The Freedom Quilt so that it could be a touring show or a fully realized main stage production. The problem with the current cast size is that Clara, Jack, Annie Rae, and Mama are roles that cannot be double cast. This means that there is already a need for four actors before any additional characters are added. I found a way to get the cast down to eight, but that is still not really a touring sized company. This is the one area that I found the writer in me struggling with the director. As a writer, I didn't want to silence any of the voices that came to me demanding to be heard, but the director stood off in the corner saying, "The show won't get produced if the cast is too big". Since the play covers a four year span I found it difficult to limit the number of actors, even though most of them are required to play multiple roles.

I came to realize in the rehearsal process, that some of the scenes can be extended like the ones with Elijah, Henry/Elise, and Sally/ Geo. I also recognize that there has to be

a sense of urgency in the action and rhythm of the play after Clara leaves Home Plantation, and that can't be weighed down by long scenes and incessant dialogue.

I'd like to see The Freedom Quilt produced, and have every intention of submitting it for consideration after I take a breath, implement certain changes in the script and redraft it. I would also be interested in workshopping my next draft; Clara's Quilt, to further develop the story as well as to see if I could create a touring script for no more than six actors.

In the beginning of this story, Clara is in many ways invisible, which makes her journey all the more remarkable. This is a story about possibilities, a story about the dream being bigger than the fear. It's a story about family, and as Annie Rae says, "Love being thicker than blood" (Appendix A 31). This is a story about a girl, growing into womanhood during a time when her gender, race and class, made her vulnerable to everyone around her. Every day, every month, and every year of her life she was vulnerable to the whims of others. Clara's ability to dream and see something for herself, outside of her given circumstances makes her naïve in some ways, and fearless in others. Clara's story is one of dreams that persevere in the most unlikely situations. Hers is an American story that is tied to an incredible historic possibility within a historic reality, and that makes for good theatre.

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Works Cited

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APPENDIX A

THE FREEDOM QUILT

Adapted by April A. Jones from Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt by Deborah Hopkinson

Setting: Home Plantation. Liberty, Ky. 1849-53

CHARACTERS

Clara (able to play 13-16)
Annie Rae (Aunt Rachel)
Jack (14-17)
Elijah(14-16)/Henry
Cook /Sally/Black Woman
Mama(Dora)
Ben /Black Man/John Parker
Cleophus/Blue/Neighbor
Overseer/Reuben Benedict
Billy/ White Man/Geo
Sam/Anna Benedict
White Woman/Elise

Notes from the playwright: Clara's voice overs (V/O) are her adult voice retelling a story as the audience watches the story unfold. Music is left to the discretion of the director, but is integral to the play, and reinforces the idea of codes imbedded in all forms of communication. The voice overs are also scene shifts, and an opportunity for the director to incorporate sound, movement or projections. There is no intermission.

Voice over begins as lights come up on Clara entering cabin. She falls to the floor bone tired and cries.

CLARA V/O

I was named after my Grandmama, but Mama took to callin' me Sweet Clara, 'cause she say I had a sweet tooth. Blackstrap molasses, fruit right off the tree, cake, pie, or just a touch of sugar on the tip of my finger. I don't remember my life in Kentucky being happy or sad particular, 'til a day I'll never forget as being one of the saddest ever. I reckon I was near bout twelve when I got sold away from North Farm in Elizabethtown. Snatched up from my Mama to work the fields at Home Plantation in Liberty. I cried so much, and so hard, I thought I would bust, but it didn't matter 'cause I had to work them fields, or pay the price. Jack, worked beside me sometimes, and tried to keep my spirits up. I reckon he felt sorry for me. All I talked about was goin' back to my Mama, and after livin' on a farm all my life, I sure wasn't used to bein' on no plantation. Jack helped keep me strong; him and Annie Rae, who was raisin' me. Most folk called her Aunt Rachel, and even though she wont my kin, she told me that "Love is thicker than blood", and she showed me every day.

Annie Rae enters the cabin.

ANNIE RAE

You won't eat, hardly drink, but you got plenty water for tears.

CLARA

(trying to catch her breath) I...miss ...my...Mama....

ANNIE RAE

I know you do baby... maybe you'll see her again one day. God willin'.

CLARA

Why wouldn't God want me to see my Mama?

ANNIE RAE

Here child, I bought some leftovers from the big house.

CLARA

I ain't hungry.

ANNIE RAE

'Course you are, and lonesome too. How your hands feelin' this evenin'?

CLARA

Still painin' me... sometime, I think they gonna stay sore forever.

ANNIE RAE

Well you know forever is a long, long time. Hands shoulda toughened up by now. Did you fix up a poultice like I showed you?

CLARA

Yes'm. But it don't seem to be doin' much good. Overseer be watchin me like he just waitin' for me to fall behind. Jack been helpin me though, workin' extra so I don't get in no trouble.

ANNIE RAE

(Beat) I been thinkin'...

CLARA

'Bout what?

ANNIE RAE

Gettin' get you outta them fields.

CLARA

How?

ANNIE RAE

That's what I been thinkin' on. The *how* of it.

CLARA

Oh...

ANNIE RAE

Tryin' to figure a way to get you workin' up to the Big house.

CLARA

The Big House? Annie Rae I don't believe I can work all close up on those white folks like that.

ANNIE RAE

It's easier on your hands and body than that hemp field. The missus been talkin' bout needin' another seamstress Clara, so if you can see your way round a needle and thread maybe we can...

CLARA

S'pose I ain't no better at sewin' than I am at workin the field?

ANNIE RAE

If you already done made up your mind that you can't do a thing, then you won't never even try.

CLARA

How my clumsy old hands gonna make them tiny, tiny stitches like you do?

ANNIE RAE

Practice. You do a thing long enough, you can't help but get good at it. *(goes to get sewing scraps)* Here's a few scraps I been collectin'. This come from some curtains I stitched a few months before you got here. This here is from some fancy britches I made Young Master George. *(picking up a satin piece)* Made a dress for Miss 'Lizabeth's coming out with this...

CLARA

It's beautiful...

ANNIE RAE

...and smooth...

CLARA

...soft as baby hair...

ANNIE RAE

(whispering, secretive) Don't care much for Miss 'Lizabeth, but she sure looked beautiful in that dress. Here's a piece we can start you off on. *(It is an ugly coarse piece)*

CLARA

(picking up satin piece) Why can't I start on this piece?

ANNIE RAE

Cause you don't know bout the "art" of sewing...yet, but I'm gonna teach you. *(picks up a needle)* Now this, is a neeeeeedle...*(dragging the word out)*

CLARA

(laughing) I know that Annie Rae...

ANNIE RAE

...and this here is thhhh-rrread...

CLARA

Annie Rae!

ANNIE RAE

C'mon child, I'm gonna show you a way to work out some of your pain.

(They sit and Annie Rae begins Clara's sewing lesson. Lights fade and v/o begins scene transition)

CLARA V/O

My fingers hurt from sewin' near bout bad as my hands ached from field work, but I kept at it. Stitch after stitch, after blessed stitch. And workin' that hemp? Huh, somethin' always needed doin'. Tyin' them baits, rettin' that hemp, breakin' it then swinglin' it. That was some hard, hard work. *(Beat)* I ain't think I was gonna take to them sewin lessons with Annie Rae, but she was right 'bout getting good at something if you do it long enough. For most part of a year, she taught me all kinds of stitchin. See, sock stitchin ain't the same as embroidery. Can't sew silk the same you would homespun. She'd make me do a row of stitches, pull them all out, and tell me to do them again, but this time even smaller. Annie Rae was right 'bout something else too. In a funny kinda way, I put all of my longin', all of my pain, and all my sadness into those tiny little stitches.

Early evening, near Late November. Sound of Laughter. Lights up on Clara, Jack and Elijah in front of the cabin.

ELIJAH

They think I'm dumb cause of how I talk and act when they come round. *(he mimics)* "Yassuh, bossman...I's jist now fixin to do whut I knowed I shoulda been did..." *(Jack and Clara laugh at Elijah's clowning)* I ain't dumb though, and I got my reasons for doin it.

JACK

Oh yeah? What?

ELIJAH

They don't watch me as close as they do some of the others cause I act like I don't hardly see or hear nothin. Get to do things...go places...Past few months, I been ridin in the wagon. Even went to Louisville.

CLARA

Louisville?

ELIJAH

Walked right down Main Street.

JACK

What you see?

ELIJAH

All sort of things. Steamboats, fancy carriages

JACK

How you get to see all that?

ELIJAH

Massa Johnson done took to callin me his “footman” so wherever his feet go...I go. *(They laugh)*

CLARA

What else you seen?

ELIJAH

Dandified colored folk ,all dressed up, talkin’ proper and walkin’ ‘round free.

JACK

How they act?

CLARA

They act different from us?

ELIJAH

I seen one, that sounded more French than a Frenchman. *(they laugh)*

Wish I could go to Louisville. Ain’t never seen no city before....

ELIJAH

Maybe, after I get my “inheritance”, I take you one day, and show you ‘round. *(They laugh)*

JACK

Inheritance? Boy, you sound like you been kicked in the head!

ELIJAH

You know what? Them steamboats I seen in Louisville, is on the Ohio River. On this side of the river, in Kentucky? We slaves, and on the other side we free.

Silence

JACK

What it feel like?...Bein’ that close to...

There is a call from offstage.

OFFSTAGE VOICE

Footman! Elijah Footman! Massa Johnson callin'. Footman! Elijah Footman! *(The children laugh)*

ELIJAH

Told ya'. Gotta go. I'll tell ya'll more 'bout my travels next time. *(Elijah runs off)*

CLARA

He a mess.

JACK

(Looking after Elijah, distracted) Yeah...

CLARA

Jack, can you come inside for a minute... got somethin' I want to show you... *(They move into the cabin. Clara hands Jack a handkerchief she has embroidered)*
You like it?

JACK

(In awe) You made this?

CLARA

Naw, Kris Kringle!

JACK

See now I know you lyin' . . . everybody knows "Ol Kris" don't come down to the quarters.

CLARA

(Hitting him playfully she laughs) Do you like it?

JACK

(Taking her hand) Never would have thought that a girl with knuckles so big could make somethin' this fine.

CLARA

(Hitting him again and laughing) Go on now!

Annie Rae rushes on, excited.

ANNIE RAE

Clara! *(Clara and Jack move away from each other)* Guess What?

CLARA

(Clara is caught off guard) Ma'am?

ANNIE RAE

I took that piece of velvet stitchin' of yours up to the missus...

CLARA

What? Why? I'm not good enough yet Annie Rae!

ANNIE RAE

Don't you ever let me hear you say that again you understand? You good enough, got to be good enough. To many other folks willin' to tell you that you ain't, so don't tell it to yourself.

CLARA

(Embarrassed in front of Jack) That's not what I meant...

JACK

(Trying to help) Miss Rachel, what the missus say 'bout Clara's stitchin'... If you don't mind me askin'.

Annie Rae looks slowly from Clara to Jack.

ANNIE RAE

Well now, I got to think how to put it...

CLARA

What??

ANNIE RAE

She want me to bring you to the Big House tomorrow...

CLARA

For what?

ANNIE RAE

...let me think how to put it...

CLARA

...what the missus want with me?

ANNIE RAE

Hush now. . . she said to bring you to the Big House tomorrow...

CLARA

You already said that part Annie Rae....

ANNIE RAE

Well if you would stop interruptin'... *(saying it fast)* said to bring you up to the Big House tomorrow mornin' and to put you to work cause we got extra sewin for the holidays and if you do a good job, she'll keep you on. You a seamstress now child!

CLARA

(she is amazed) Really? A seamstress?

ANNIE RAE

Praise the lord! *(Clara hugs Annie Rae)*

JACK

I knew you could do it Sweet Clara. . . big knuckles and all.

ANNIE RAE

Stop teasin' her Jack...

CLARA

He just mad 'cause he got that big old hammer toe.

ANNIE RAE

Clara!

JACK

It ain't a hammer toe; *(mimicking an English accent)* it's a bunion.

They laugh. Then there is an awkward silence between Jack and Clara.

JACK

Well, I best be gettin' on. Days start early 'round here. I'm right proud of you Clara.

ANNIE RAE

Just a minute Jack. Got somethin' I want you to take to Sister Tess. *(crossing to hand him a small package)* Tell her to put a pinch in a cup of boilin' water and let it sit 'til it cools. Then sip it. Don't drink it down fast, small sips.

JACK
Yes'm. Evenin...

CLARA
(beat) Goodnight

ANNIE RAE
Goodnight. Don't forget.

JACK
Yes'm...

ANNIE RAE
Go on now.

JACK
Bye...

CLARA
Bye...

ANNIE RAE
(Pushing Jack out) Bye. *(To Clara)* I hope you not doin' womanly things with Young Jack.

CLARA
(Embarrassed) Annie Rae!

ANNIE RAE
Don't "Annie Rae" me.

CLARA
We just friends that's all. I ain't thinkin' 'bout doin' womanly things with Jack or nobody else and that's a fact!

ANNIE RAE
Well, sometimes for a woman, it's not your choice I'm sorry to say, but the time'll come sooner or later when you will be "thinkin bout it". You just remember what I'm tellin you.

CLARA
Yes'm, I will...*(under breath)* don't sound like much fun though...

ANNIE RAE

Uh-huh, just don't go practicin'. Now come on over here, you got some sewin' to do. *(She holds out the precious satin piece)*

CLARA

You want me to...but Annie Rae, that's your best piece..it's so fine, and my knuckles too big...

ANNIE RAE

Sweet Clara if you don't come over here and get to sewin' you had better.

(Clara runs to Annie Rae and embraces her)

CLARA

Oh Annie Rae, thank you, thank you, thank you! Ain't nobody ever gave me nothin' like this before.

ANNIE RAE

Child, you 'bout to squeeze both me *and* this little old piece of fabric to death.

CLARA

I'm gonna make somethin' real special with this.

ANNIE RAE

I know you will. Go on now, and I'll fix us somethin' to eat.

(Lights Fade. V/O begins. Scene change into the kitchen)

CLARA V/O

Workin' at the Big House was hard, in a different kinda way from field work. Truth be told, bein' 'round white folks in they house, took some gettin' use to at first, and my nerves was a mess! But I spent most of my time in the sewin' room, off the kitchen. I'd set in there and stitch all kinds of things. Socks, britches, and bloomers... shirts, dresses, sheets, petticoats. Tablecloths, curtains, shawls, overcoats, and sometimes? Annie Rae even stitched people! She was a midwife and a doctor...down in the quarters anyway. She could mend people and animals too. Once, one of the horses was 'bout to foal, and havin' a real hard time with it. They sent for one of them fancy animal doctors, but he couldn't do nothin' 'cept to tell them to put that horse outta her misery. Then he got on his mount and rode right back on home, just as nice as you please. Annie Rae asked could she least try to save the foal, so they left her there. All night. Never checked on her or that poor horse.

Come morning there was a new thoroughbred on Home Plantation. She saved that mare too.

Months later, mid morning. Lights up on the kitchen and part of the sewing room. Clara works, and Cook is busy preparing and cleaning. Cook picks up a cookie.

COOK *(to Clara)*

Pssst!

Clara looks up and seeing the cookie goes to get it Offstage male voices are heard so Clara and Cook resume their duties. Two black men arrive at the open kitchen door.

CLEOPHUS

Excuse me ma'am. My name Cleophus, and this here is Ben. We drivin' for the gentlemens that's visitin', and we was told that we could get a cool drink and maybe a bite to eat while we was waitin'.

COOK

Come on in. I'd offer you a seat but...

BEN

We don't need to sit. We got more room for vittles if we stand.

COOK

Well, I got some biscuits left from breakfast. *(Getting biscuits)* Where bout ya'll from?

CLEOPHUS

I'm from the Wingham place.

BEN

Jasper Plantation, near the state line.

COOK

You come a ways.

BEN

Mmm-hmm...

COOK

If you don't mind me askin, what y'all doin' so far from, home?

Ben and Cleophus share a look.

CLEOPHUS

Slave owners formin' patrols...

COOK

Why?

CLEOPHUS

Fugitive Slave Laws... too many runaways, and there's money to be made.

BEN

They aim to go north if they have too, and bring them back... use 'em for "examples".

COOK

Lord have mercy, I don't understand this runnin' away. Where you gonna run to?

BEN

Freedom... maybe home to Africa!

CLEOPHUS

Africa? Africa don't mean nothin' to me. I ain't thinkin' bout no Africa.

BEN

Don't mean you suppose to stop believin'. I might not ever see freedom, but I'm gonna always believe.

CLEOPHUS

I done seen people split open just for talkin' freedom. Seen 'em killed all kinda ways. Beat to death, lynched, burned, maimed. . . families lost...

BEN

Families lost when "massa" decides to breed your woman so he can get rich. Sell off his children, your children, your mama, just 'cause he "feel like it."

COOK

Easy now. We know all that. Calm your voice.

(Beat)

BEN

Ohio River not that far.

COOK

What that suppose to mean?

BEN

Get to the Ohio River? Underground Railroad carry you right on across.

CLEOPHUS

Carry who right on across? I ain't crossin' no water. The last time my peoples crossed some water it was on a boat, and you see where that got us?

Cook and Cleophus laugh. Clara giggles.

COOK

Go on now! (Gives them something to drink)

BEN

If you had a map you could find your way easy.

CLEOPHUS

You got to be able to read a map Ben. And if it's so easy, why you still a slave?

BEN

'Cause I ain't got no map! And quiet as it's kept... I *can* read.

CLEOPHUS

Uh-huh... alright now...

Clara who has been listening enters.

CLARA

What's a map?

Cook gives Ben a look The men become preoccupied with their Biscuits.

COOK

Just a drawin'...of the land that shows you where things are and how to get to a place. Whatever's on the ground can be drawn on a map.

BEN

And if you got a map and follow the North Star you can get to Canada and freedom.

COOK

Hush all that talk now. This child don't know nothin' about all that. Don't go fillin' her head with dreams.

CLARA

But what's wrong with dreams?

COOK

Got to be free to dream, so slaves ain't got nothin' to be dreamin' 'bout.

CLARA

I remember once, when I was still with my Mama, she give me a piece of rock candy. I couldn't figure how she got it, but I made that candy last near 'bout a week. I broke off a little piece of it every night before I went to bed and let it melt in my mouth while I went off to sleep. It made me have sweet dreams too. I told myself that if me and my Mama ever got free, I was gonna have me a piece of rock candy every night before I went to bed.

COOK

Be careful with that freedom talk Clara there's ears everywhere.

CLARA

I know... it's just that...

COOK

(Gently to Clara) You ain't the first slave that felt that way and I promise and you sure wont be the last.

CLARA *(To Ben)*

You ever know anybody that was free?

BEN

Yeah...

Cook gives Ben a stern look interrupting his response.

BEN

Uh... white people! *(They laugh)*

CLARA

That ain't what I mean!

COOK

Clara, ain't you got some needle work you need to get to?

CLARA

Ma'am?

COOK

Stitchin'... sewin'... ain't that what you do madam seamstress?

Clara starts to exit sadly.

CLARA

Yes'm...

BEN (to Clara)

It was a pleasure to make your acquaintance miss, (*whispers*) and I hope you get all the rock candy you dream of.

CLARA

Thank you. (*whispers*) And I hope you get to freedom.

COOK

Clara! (*she scurries off*) Look here mister, I don't mean no harm, but you can't go fillin' that child's head with crazy notions and you can't be talkin that talk in my kitchen!

BEN

My apologies..., and I don't mean no disrespect, but this ain't "your" kitchen. This here belong to that white man who own this kitchen same as he own you!

COOK

No need to get high and mighty with me...

CLEOPHUS

Whoa, whoa, hold on now Ben, Ain't no cause for us to turn on our own.

BEN

You right. I'm sorry. It's just that... I'm gonna wait outside.

COOK

You think you the only nigga' ever dreamed 'bout freedom?

BEN

I ain't no nigga'.

COOK

You think you the only one ever had that dream? I done buried three children and seen four sold off, and I dreamed of freedom for each and every one of them . . . and myself too. I done loved and lost more times than I wanna remember and the one thing I have learned is that “massa” gonna do what “massa” wanna do and how I *feel* don’t figure into it.

BEN

And I have learned that “massa” might can chain my body, but he cant’ chain my mind. Much obliged for the food. *(To Cleophus)* I’ll be outside.

Ben exits. Silence.

CLEOPHUS

Well... he sure got a fire lit under him huh?

COOK

Hmph.

CLEOPHUS

You reckon I could have another one of them biscuits? They sure are tasty. *(Cook still angry gives him a biscuit)* Thank you kindly.

Beat

COOK

I tried once. Was gonna take my chances and follow the Drinkin’ Gourd, follow the North Star to freedom. I was hungry... tired... scared... but I was gonna find my freedom. That’s when I lost my last baby. They took her from me... beat her out of my body, then sold me off. Been here ever since and I ain’t bit more thought ‘bout no freedom.

CLEOPHUS

Don’t know where my Mama is. Seen my Daddy once. Been told one of mybrothers is in Virginia...don’t know ‘bout the others. Ain’t seen my sister in near ‘bout 10 years. Even though I don’t speak on freedom, I reckon I’ll most likely think ‘bout it every day of my life. I thank you for the food. Reckon I’ll go on outside now.

Cleophus exits. Cook stares off. Clara enters silently.

CLARA

What’s the Underground Railroad?

Cook looks at Clara as lights fade. V/O begins scene change.

CLARA VIO

(Laughter) Cook never did answer my question. Not really, so I asked Annie Rae. At first she tried to act like she didn't know what I was talkin' 'bout, but she didn't want me to be ignorant. Annie Rae taught me a lot of things and showed me a lot of things too, like the North Star. It's a part of the Drinkin' Gourd; the Big Dipper. I never knew the stars could guide you, lead you, and light your way to the Promised Land. Annie Rae told me that the Underground Railroad was these secret stations; houses and things where people followin' freedom could get help... food, shelter and clothes before being sent to the next station. People was sent from station to station, getting closer and closer to a place where they could raise a family, and own a piece of land and they wont slaves no more. Everybody didn't make it though. It's more than a notion to follow freedom. One day that Fall; after the leaves started turnin', me and Annie Rae was getting' ready to leave the Big House. We was headin' back to the quarters when it seems like everythin' went crazy.

Weeks later, early evening. Lights up on Clara in sewing room staring at a blue piece of fabric. Annie Rae enters putting on her shawl. Clara rushes to her.

CLARA

Annie Rae look at this...

ANNIE RAE

You bout ready?

CLARA

(Clara hands her the fabric and puts on her shawl) Can you see it?

ANNIE RAE

What I'm s'pose to see but a scrap?

CLARA

If you look real hard you can see...

ANNIE RAE

Clara, if you don't get to movin, you had better

CLARA

But don't it look like somethin'?

ANNIE RAE

Yeah, a scrap. C'mon child I need to rest these weary bones.

CLARA

. . it's shaped just like the cow pond see? Annie Rae, I understand now...
this is a map!

Cook rushes on.

COOK

(Whispering, nervously) Anybody seen Jack?

ANNIE RAE

What's wrong?

COOK

(To Clara) You seen Jack?

CLARA

Yesterday evenin'...

COOK

Not since then?

ANNIE RAE

What's goin' on?

COOK

I just took the "gentlemen" their brandy and I overheard some things.

ANNIE RAE

What things?

COOK

Look like Young Jack done run off.

CLARA

What??!!

COOK

Him and that boy Elijah, from the Johnson place...

ANNIE RAE

You sure?

COOK

They gettin' the dogs on them...

CLARA

No!!!

COOK

If you know somethin' you best tell it. Might save Jacks' life.

CLARA

I don't know nothin'. He didn't tell me... Annie Rae, they gonna kill him if they catch him?

COOK

If? Oh, they gonna catch him alright.

ANNIE RAE

Bertha!

COOK

Rachel, you can't protect that girl but so much. I don't know what was on that boys mind. .
. he lost to us for sure now..

CLARA

Don't say that!

ANNIE RAE

Clara! Bertha please...

CLARA

Miss Tess...we gotta get to Miss Tess.

ANNIE RAE

C'mon. (To Cook) If you hear anything... anything at all...

COOK

I will. Go on now.

Cook exits. Beat.

CLARA

Why Cook act like that? She want Jack to get caught?

ANNIE RAE

Hush now. Show me the North Star. *(Clara looks at Annie Rae then points to the sky)* Uh-huh.

CLARA

Where you think Jack is?

ANNIE RAE

I just pray that boy is safe

CLARA

How long does it take to get to freedom?

Sound of dogs barking.

ANNIE RAE

(Pulling Clara) C'mon hurry. You sure Jack didn't tell you nothin'? Cause they gonna ask you. Folks see you together all the time. They gonna think you know somethin'.

CLARA

(Pulling away and stopping) Jack didn't tell me nothing. If he had, I'd be gone now too.

The barking intensifies. Annie Rae and Clara freeze.

OVERSEER *(offstage)*

Check the quarters again..., somebody knows something...you got the rope?

BILLY *(offstage)*

Hell yeah... you'd think these darkies woulda realized by now that free ain't a word that applies to them.

SAM *(offstage)*

Once they run; even if you catch them, thet're spoiled.. .harder to control...

OVERSEER *(offstage)*

Cut out all that jaw jacking. Lets get moving;

Sound of the dogs and men retreat .

CLARA

We got to find Miss Tess. *(Clara starts off)*

ANNIE RAE (Stopping her)

Didn't you hear them boys? That's just where they headed. If Tess know anythin' they won't get it from her. *(Beat)* As hard as it sounds we can't do nothin' right now Clara...

CLARA

Annie Rae...

ANNIE RAE

...nothin', But wait.

CLARA

But they talkin' bout lynchin' and whippin' and...

ANNIE RAE

...all we can do is wait. Wait and pray.

CLARA

They'll kill him Annie Rae!

We hear the overseer speak before we see him.

OVERSEER

Well, well, well, who do we have here? Is that Clara? Sweet Clara? My Sweet Clara?...and Rachel.. I miss seem' you out in them fields Clara. I remember how sweet you looked.. .workin' so hard...

ANNIE RAE

(Overlapping him she starts to exit with Clara) We just turnin' in for the night...

OVERSEER

...in that hot sun. DON'T YOU MOVE!!! *(They stop and he walks closer)*
You know, you use to have that look Rachel.., *(Rachel turns to him, fire in her eyes as two more men enter.)*

BILLY

The others are headin' towards the river...

SAM

We got horses ... canteens . . . plenty of bullets...

BILLY

Yeah! Let's ride! *(He shoots his gun. Annie Rae and Clara try to leave.)*

OVERSEER

Not another step!

SAM

C'mon we got some huntin' to do!

OVERSEER

Don't rush me! As you can see I'm asking some questions...

BILLY

C'mon Zach... they don't know nothing... you're wasting your time...let's ride! *(He starts to shoot gun again, but Zach turns to him with his gun drawn.)*

OVERSEER

You talking to me Billy? You giving me orders?

BILLY

(Gun shifts in Sam's direction) Uhhh...

SAM

Hey! Careful where you point that thing!

OVERSEER

You the boss? You the one givin' orders? What you got to say now?

BILLY

Nothin'... Zachariah...nothin'...

SAM

C'mon now Zachariah, he don't mean nothin' by what he said...it's just his first time huntin this type of "coon". C'mon we got some niggas to catch. C'mon. *(Overseer hesitantly holsters his gun and looks at Annie Rae and Clara)*

OVERSEER

It's a cold night, I might need my bed warmed when I get back.*(To Billy and Sam as they exit.)* Where's my horse?

BILLY

I got him saddled and ready. When I get my part of the reward I'm gonna get me a new pair of boots...

*Sound of dogs barking, sporadic gunshots, horses and male voices.
Clara and Annie Rae exit. Sound fades as v/o begins. Scene
Change.*

CLARA VIO

The night Jack ran away I couldn't sleep for nothin'. Part of me was mad at him for not takin' me, or at least tellin' me his plans. Then I thought maybe it was 'cause he didn't want to put me in no danger. Then I got scared that if they didn't catch him and lynch him, or sell him to the deep south, that he was gonna die anyway. *(Beat)* Then I started thinkin' 'bout that scrap of blue fabric shaped like the cow pond, and it seemed like a sign, me figurin' how to make a map on the day that Jack needed it most. That's when I made up my mind. I was gonna stitch me a map. A quilt maybe, using scraps of cloth tucked away from the Big House, and anywhere else I could find. My mind was turnin' every which a way. I was scared for Jack, but I was also dreamin' 'bout freedom and my quilt; a freedom quilt. I sure could've used a piece of rock candy to help me sleep that night.

Sunday, mid afternoon, six weeks later. In front of Annie Rae's cabin. Clara is drawing with a stick in the dirt. Annie Rae approaches her with a pan of biscuits.)

ANNIE RAE

Here's some biscuits Clara. Now you didn't eat before church service so I know you got room.

CLARA

I ain't. hungry

Annie Rae takes a biscuit and sits with Clara.

ANNIE RAE

I know you thinkin' 'bout Jack.

CLARA

Uh-huh...

ANNIE RAE

Sister Tess say he healin' nicely.

CLARA

It's been weeks Annie Rae...weeks, since they beat Elijah to death and near 'bout killed Jack!

ANNIE RAE

(Hugging her) Shh, I know baby... Elijah's was just... but at least Jack is alive, and he ain't been sold deep south. That's something to be thankful for, Jack is still alive.

CLARA

And he still a slave. *(Beat)* How can you belong to somebody that ain't even your kin?

ANNIE RAE

Clara, listen to me. No matter what white folk say bout us, we people too. We human beings too just like they are. We love, bleed, lie, laugh and die same as them. We wont meant to be slaves no more than they was meant to be massa. We least as smart ,if not more smart than they are. Truth be told? Some of us near 'bout crazy, and hateful as them too! *(They laugh)* We all people, and we all got dreams. So many of us just scared that's all. Fear is a very powerful thing... sometimes more powefull than love. You listenin'?

CLARA

Yes 'm

ANNIE RAE

He was free Clara... for a time, Jack was free and I don't expect he ever gonna forget what that tasted like.

CLARA

I hate 'em.

ANNIE RAE

Who?

CLARA

White folks.

ANNIE RAE

Can't say that I don't understand how you feel. I've come to learn howsomever that hatin' take more time and effort than livin', and most folk hate what they fear. You hear me Clara?

CLARA

Yes'm

ANNIE RAE

Good. Now take a biscuit.

Clara takes a biscuit and resumes drawing in the dirt. Annie Rae returns to the cabin. Jack slowly enters, still in pain. Clara jumps up, and runs to hug him. He winces, Clara lets him go.

CLARA

I'm sorry...

JACK

I'm alright. . .you just caught me with one of them big old knuckles.
(They laugh) How you been Clara?

CLARA

No, how you been? *(she motions him to sit)* I been worried.

JACK

I'm sorry Clara...

CLARA

For what? *(She begins to draw in the dirt)*

JACK

For not tellin' you my plans, for not includin' you... *(Beat)* But if I had a told you....if we had a took you with us... you might have come out dead like Elijah, or near dead like me, or even worse cause you a woman. *(Beat)* We had plans, me and Elijah did. I figured that after I got to freedom, I was gonna get you, Mama Tess, and Miss Rachel outta here if I had to beg, borrow or steal. Ya'll the only family I got.

CLARA

(Beat) Wish I could have seen what you seen. . . got a taste from the drinkin' gourd...

JACK

What you know bout the drinkin' gourd?

CLARA

Lot of travelers come by the kitchen when I'm up to the Big House. I hear them talkin' 'bout all kind of people and all kind of places and...

JACK

(Nervous) Clara...

CLARA

I'm makin' me a map.

JACK

What kinda map?

CLARA

I'm sewin' it. . . on a quilt.

JACK

Clara, you feel airight?

CLARA

You was free Jack, you can show me, help me. . . see? *(She points to dirt drawing)* The cow pond, it's a blue scrap on the quilt, and the Jefferson place is made from yellow calico. You know why?

JACK

(Beat) Chickens, they raise chickens.

CLARA

Show me what you seen Jack so I could put it in the quilt.

Jack stares at Clara for a moment. She hands him the stick and he clears away her drawing in the dirt. Just as Jack begins to draw there is a bird call or some sound of warning. The Overseer enters.

OVERSEER

Well lookie here. *(Jack and Clara jump up)* I'm surprised that you're up and about after that lashing you got boy. Must be healed... guess you're ready to get back to work huh? *(Beat)* I'm talkin to you boy!

Annie Rae comes out of the cabin with a shirt and goes to the Overseer. A few others enter.

ANNIE RAE

Got that shirt fixed for you bossman... It's near 'bout good as new.

NEIGHBOR

Got a little "pot liquor" over here Miss Rachel if you want a taste.

ANNIE RAE

Much obliged neighbor. *(Handing shirt to Overseer)* Good day to you sir...

(Annie Rae and others “stare down” Overseer . He exits)

ANNIE RAE

Jack, I’m gonna fix you a plate, hear?

JACK

Yes’m. *(Annie Rae enters the cabin. Clara and Jack remain silent Then he picks up the stick, sits and begins to draw. Clara goes to him)*

‘Bout 10 miles west of here is a chimney. Ain’t no house, just a chimney. And maybe 7 or 8 mile further is a stone church...

V/O begins. Lights shift. Jack exits and Blue enters.

CLARA V/O

Jack told a lot of things that Sunday, and I knew that I could put some of his longin’ and pain into the quilt, the same way I put mine into sewin’. I kept right on gatherin’ scraps of talk, and scraps of cloth. Every now and again, folk would slip me a bit of information, here and there that I could also work into the quilt. I found ways to hide the true purpose of my design with, symbols, shapes, colors; even the knots in the thread or the stitch pattern I used. I also found I had to be special careful, ‘cause sometimes folk, ain’t what they seem.

(The feeling of this scene is that of related events overlapping into memory. All characters except Clara should visually fade in and out of the action and their last words; in parenthesis repeat, and overlap the next speaker This is not linear or sequential. The repeated words are what trigger Clara’s memories. She is in a pool of light sewing the freedom quilt when Blue enters)

BLUE

Afternoon Miss Clara, nice day.

CLARA

(Beat) I know you Mister?

BLUE

Miss Tess send me.

CLARA

What for?

BLUE

To talk wit’ you.

CLARA

‘Bout??

BLUE

(slow and deliberate) A few places I been.

CLARA

(understanding) Oh...

BLUE

Miss Tess tell me you got a gift...

CLARA

I don’t know what you mean...

BLUE

I’m sure you do girl... I can see it in your eyes.

CLARA

I ain’t no girl, I’m near ‘bout 16.

BLUE

Ah, well, you almost a woman then. *(he bows)* Sincerest apologies.

CLARA

(Laughing) You talk funny... *(Sobering)* I don’t mean funny... reckon what I mean to say is... you talk different.

BLUE

(Beat) that is because I was raised on a small beautiful Island.. .many, many, many, miles away... in my youth I was stolen from my homeland and brought to the new world to be sold as human chattel. I’ve been bought and sold and bought and sold, and escaped bondage many times. But...the last time? I was severely punished *(indicating a crippled hand or foot)*. Since no one wanted to purchase damaged merchandise, I was practically given away, exchanged for a pig, some fabric and a writing pen. But I’ve bathed in the waters of the West Indies, seen the plains of Kansas and felt the chill of a Philadelphia winter. *(Beat)* I’ve been many places...

CLARA

(Testing him) I’m wonderin, if in all your travels, you ever come across any... stations?

BLUE

A few. There's different kind of stations though. One in particular that interest you Miss Clara?

CLARA

(Beat) Anything that go along Bullskin Trace?

BLUE

An old Indian trail that many have traveled. Stretches all the way from Lake Erie to the Ohio River. Caesar Creek is on the Trace, and the mineral waters at Yellow Spring, where they say Tecumseh bathed.

CLARA

Who was that?

BLUE

A proud chief, who fought for his people. Four miles west of Xenia, is the Asher place. There are three, large, oak trees as you approach; on the north side of the house, and there is a large bell mounted on the east side of (the porch...)

Lights shift as characters change.

BLACK WOMAN

...of the porch longways, is the bed quilt, and a milk pail settin' in the corner, it's a safe house. If you don't see no pail? Wait. But if that bedcover ain't there on the porch? Patrollers is out, so keep moving. If you pass a barn with a unpainted fence on the east side ... it's bad news, bad, bad news, so make sure to (stay clear)

WHITE WOMAN

...stay clear of those places. Some are a lot worse than others, but they're all bad. Slave owners around these parts are just nervous about the abolitionists.

CLARA

The who?

WHITE WOMAN

The abo-lition-ists. White and colored people who fight against the institution of slavery. They have newspapers and such to spread the word about the cause.

CLARA

(Beat) You a 'bolitionist?

WHITE WOMAN

(Smiling) I guess you could say I am.

CLARA

Oh.

WHITE WOMAN

(Beat) I was at the North Farm several weeks back. *(Clara starts)* I saw your mother.

(Beat) I told her that you were a wonderful seamstress, and that Rachel was taking good care of you.

CLARA

Who told you...how you know 'bout.. *(Beat)* How she look?

WHITE WOMAN

She looks... well, but she misses you terribly.

CLARA

She have any more young'uns?

WHITE WOMAN

Not that I saw. *(Beat)* She sent a message for you to remember the lap dog and the rock candy. *(Clara smiles)* What does it mean?

CLARA

Dreams...

WHITE WOMAN

(Beat) Ever heard of Ohio?

CLARA

(A bit too quickly) No. *(Beat)* I mean, I mighta heard mention of it.

WHITE WOMAN

Outside of Columbus is a town called Marengo in Morrow County. Further north and to the east, in Ashtabula, is a friend named Colonel Hubbard.

CLARA

Why you tellin' me all this?

WHITE WOMAN

Because I am also a (friend of a friend.)

White woman exits as Black man enters.

BLACK MAN

... friend of a friend. That's part of the code... a way for passengers and conductors on the railroad to recognize one another. Havin' friends on the path to freedom, help ease the hardship of the journey. 'Til you get to the Ohio River, remember to travel at night, keep to the woods, stay alert, and read the land, and the sky. *(Beat)* Now, I hear they gonna be plantin' wheat over to the Welling Plantation this year... yessir... wheat can be seen for quite a ways Miss Clara... if you know what I mean... (quite a ways...)

Black man fades as White man enters.

WHITE MAN

...quite a ways, but I was born and pretty much raised in the south. Grewed up right next to colored folk. I knowed we's just as poor and miserable as them, but treated a tad better 'cause we's white. That is, we's treated better in front of the colored folk, otherwise we's treated like poor white trash. Reckon that's when I knowed the real fight is 'tween the haves and the have nots, not tween the white and colored. If'n you ever find yourself in Clark county, the Pitchfords is decent folks to know. They got a small farm, and a coupla horses that look (mighty fine...)

ANNIE RAE

... look mighty fine Clara, what kind of pattern you got there?

CLARA

Just somethin' I'm makin' up as I go along. It's gonna tell a story.

ANNIE RAE

I like stories. How this one go?

CLARA

I ain't sure. I mean, I know the beginnin' but... I ain't sure 'bout the end.

ANNIE RAE

Tell me the beginnin' then.

CLARA

(Beat) Once there was this beautiful girl... that was very, very smart. She could read and she could figure... and she had dreams. Her name was Cla... Clytemnestra, and she...

ANNIE RAE

Who?

CLARA

Cly-tem-nes-tra. *(Beat)* It's a name I heard Master James readin' out a book one day when he was gettin' his schoolin' up to the Big House.

ANNIE RAE

Mmm-hmm. Go on.

CLARA

So Clytemnestra, or "Cly", cause that's what her friends called her... was kept locked up by this big old scraggly monster with scraggly hair and scraggly teeth and bad, bad, breath.

ANNIE RAE

(Laughing) Child please!

CLARA

(Quietly) Out the window where she was locked up, she could see freedom... but it looked so far away. Cly missed her mother somethin' fierce, but she knew that as smart and strong as she was, she could get to freedom, and see her Mama again.

There is a moment of silence. Annie Rae points to the quilt.

ANNIE RAE

West of the Lee Farm is a bad swamp... dangerous snakes and such. If you go 'round it, 'bout four miles northeast is a creek. Look for the deer path. It's hid prettty good So...

CLARA

(Crossing to Annie Rae) Come with us.

ANNIE RAE

Us?

CLARA

Me, Jack, Miss Tess... my Mama...

ANNIE RAE

Your Mama?

CLARA

Mmm-hmm, and others we might pick up at stations along the way.

ANNIE RAE

You know how long it's gonna take to finish this quilt? How dangerous it is what you doin'?

CLARA

I just know that you told me we won't meant to be slaves... so I reckon we meant to be free.

Beat. Annie Rae hands Clara a fabric scrap.

ANNIE RAE

Maybe you can use this for somethin' . . .how 'bout the (deer path....)

Annie Rae exits as Jack enters

JACK

Then me and Elijah got to the end of the deer path and was in a field. A field full of flowers. Butterflies and a couple of bees too, *(Laugh)* but we ain't care 'bout no bees. We ran through that field Clara, just woo!...took off runnin'! *(Beat)* After while we was so winded we just fell out... laid there in that wide open space, smellin' them flowers. . . Lookin' up at that big,pretty, blue sky. . . watchin' those butterflies.., the clouds movin' over my head.. seem like I was movin' right along with them Clara. That's what I remember most 'bout bein' free.

Lights shift. V/O begins. Scene change into cabin.

CLARA V/O

In the Spring,there was a weddin' at the Big House so I was able to gather more scraps for the quilt. Seems like near 'bout everyday somebody told me a piece of somethin' that I could work into my quilt. I had to be real careful though, 'cause if word got to the wrong people 'bout what I was doin', Lord knows what my punishment would be. But the Missus and them ain't pay me much attention, with the weddin' an all, exceptin' to boss me around, tellin' me do this or do that. Then one day word come out, 'bout a rumor goin' round that somebody in the quarters had a map. Ooo-wee! Felt like heart was gonna bust right wide open. They searched all the cabins but they ain't never find my map. *(Beat)* They did find a book in Hannahs' cabin though, so they sold off her oldest boy. *(Beat)* Me and Jack was still friends but somethin' seemed different between us somehow and his eyes didn't seem as bright as they use to. I guess it was partly cause Miss Tess won't doin' so good. She had caught a stroke, and was havin' a hard time of it.

*It is well into the evening and Clara is working on the quilt in front of the fire.
Annie Rae enters very tired.*

ANNIE RAE

Sweet Clara, what you still doin' up?

CLARA

I just wanted to work on the quilt for a spell...

ANNIE RAE

Child, you need to get some rest. That whip gonna be crackin' before you know it.

CLARA

How's Jesse's leg healin' up?

ANNIE RAE

Not so good. If I can't stop that infection, he's gonna lose it. Narsonia's baby got the colic. I'm most worried bout Tess though. Lord knows it's time for that woman's suffering to end.

CLARA

She seem so different now.

ANNIE RAE

'Cause she can't do for herself no more. The she get flustered, and her words get all tangled up and she can't talk the same, so... she get mad.

CLARA

It's like bein' a slave double time.

ANNIE RAE

How you mean.

CLARA

Seem like that stroke own her body same way Master George do.

ANNIE RAE

(Beat) You got some peculiar ideas Clara, but I love you, love you like you my own. *(Hugs her)*

CLARA

You ever have children Annie Rae?

ANNIE RAE

(Beat) No.

CLARA

(Beat) Not ever?

ANNIE RAE

Not ever... been a curse and a blessin'. *(Beat)* Look like that quilt near bout done... few more months...

CLARA

Come with us Annie Rae. . . please...

ANNIE RAE

Oh Clara... sweet, sweet Clara. Your Mama sure named you right *(She sits)*
I can't go with you but I'll always be with you in spirit.

CLARA

Why Annie Rae? Why can't you come?

ANNIE RAE

'Cause my place is here. I got to help my people that's too tired, or too sick, or too scared, to get they freedom. And I got to be here to say "safe passage" to the ones that go.

CLARA

(Embracing her) I love you Annie Rae.

ANNIE RAE

Love you too...

An agitated Jack rushes into the cabin.

ANNIE RAE

What in the world?

JACK

It's Mama Tess, Miss Rachel. . . she gone... she grabbed my hand real tight and didn't let go... and then she just...

ANNIE RAE

(Grabbing her shawl) Clara, look after Jack, I'm gonna go tend to Sister Tess. *(Goes to Jack)* I'm sorry for your loss.

(Annie Rae exits. Clara goes to Jack)

CLARA

Jack... Jack... Come on over here and sit down. Come on...

JACK

I thought she was sleep. I was layin' on my pallet 'bout to drift off, and she started talkin'. I think she was talkin 'bout her husband, but I couldn't understand her. So I got up, and sat down, close, beside her, and held her hand. Listenin'. After while she reach up and touch my face and say, just as clear; "Guess it's time for me to go home". She was smiling Clara. Then she squeezed my hand... real hard like and... *(Beat)* Why Mama Tess have to suffer like that? We treated worse than dogs! Like we ain't got no sense, no feelin's, no nothing! Why can't them crackers just let us be? *(Quiet determination)* Just let us be. She got her salvation now though. She ain't get no salvation in sufferin', but she sure got it in death. Slavery done took near 'bout everybody I ever loved Clara. Can't let it take no more, you hear me? No more. Livin' like this ain't livin'. *(Controlled intensity)* If my Mama and Daddy and Elijah and Miss Tess had the same equal share as Mr. Man and Missy Ma'am up to the Big House, they wouldn't be dead now. *(Calm and quiet)* We got to go Clara, we got to. We got to...I...we... *(Clara goes to Jack to comfort him)*

CLARA

I know, Jack...I know. And we goin' Jack, we goin', but we got to give Miss Tess a decent burial first. We got to finish plannin' too. In a few months time...

JACK

Don't know if I can wait that long.

CLARA

Gonna have to. *(Beat)* I want to show you somethin' . . . *(She shows Jack the quilt. He looks at it in awe, touching it with his fingers)* I'm near 'bout done, but I need a little more time.

JACK

It's... I ain't never seen nothin' like it. *(Beat)* I ain't afraid of dyin' Clara. I stopped bein' afraid of dyin', when I stopped bein' a boy, but I ain't dyin' in Kentucky *(Looks at Clara)* and I ain't dyin' no slave.

Lights shift. Scene change. V/O begins.

CLARA V/O

Seem like so much happened in the next couple months. Hendricks got drunk, fell off his horse and broke both his arms. Six babies was born in the quarters, several of which looked just like some of the men folk up to the Big House, and Silas got bit by a fox, caught the rabies and died. Then one night, it was done. I was finished. The map was complete. I laid the quilt out for Annie Rae, and she just stared at it. Not sayin' a word. Then the tears started rollin' down her face. Annie Rae wouldn't change her mind 'bout comin' with us though, no matter what I said. She told me that freedom could mean a lot of things, and that "no mere man", could ever own her. *(Sound of rain begins and continues)*

through the scene) Three days before we planned to leave it started stormin', somethin' terrible. The heavens opened up, and God's tears rained down on us. It sounded like the end of the world. Lightning flashed, thunder roared, and the wind howled somethin' fierce. When the fury of the storm had mostly passed, there was something in the air that smelled like freedom, and I knew that it was time to go.

Lights up on Clara and Annie Rae in the cabin. No one speaks. It is still raining. Annie Rae is seated, wrapped in the Freedom Quilt and Clara is pacing.

ANNIE RAE

You 'bout to wear a hole in that floor, clear through to China.

(Clara stops pacing)

CLARA

Annie Rae...

ANNIE RAE

I know Sweet Clara. I know...

(Jack enters quickly, startling Clara. Annie Rae doesn't move)

JACK

Miss Rachel, Clara...

ANNIE RAE

Jack. *(Beat)* I figure you just nervous and that's why you ain't knock.

JACK

'Scuse me Miss Rachel I ain't mean no disrespect...

ANNIE RAE

I know. Now, come here, both of you. *(They cross to her as she rises with the quilt)* You got angels watchin' over you. Follow your map and go quickly, quietly and safely. Jack, Tess would be so proud of you.

They all hug Annie Rae moves to give the quilt to Clara, but she refuses it, placing it back on Annie Rae's shoulders.

CLARA

This quilt is meant to stay. I know it here. *(Tapping her head)* And so does Jack. Maybe one day you use it for yourself, or to help others find their way.

There is final embrace.

ANNIE RAE

Safe passage...

Annie Rae sends them off. Along with the V/O narration we see the trials and tribulations that Clara and company experience on their journey.

CLARA V/O

We left Home Plantation on a rainy Saturday night, cause, we didn't work on the Lord's day, so we probably wouldn't be missed til late Sunday. Besides, couldn't no runaway notice 'bout us appear in the paper 'til Monday, and the rain helped too. It was just a slow steady drizzle, so we felt safe in knowin' that dogs couldn't scent us long as the rain fell. We was cold, scared, and traveled mostly at night to avoid the patrols. After a few days we got to Elizabethtown, where last I heard, my Mama was still at the North Farm.

Clara and Jack approach Mama's cabin, who is preparing her pallet for sleep. Clara begins to softly singing "Mama Gonna Buy" outside the cabin door. Mama lifts her head, listening, and quietly joins in before rushing to the door, and pulling Clara and Jack inside.

MAMA

Lord have mercy, lord have mercy... Sweet Clara, that you? That really you? Oh, my lord, I never thought I'd see you again. Thought you was gone...lost to me forever like all the rest. *(She stops)* How you get...what...what you doin' here, and who this you done brought with you?

JACK

My name Jack, ma'am. Jack...Freeman.

CLARA

We followin' the drinkin' gourd Mama, and we come to take you with us.

MAMA

The drinkin' gourd? You mean...sweet Jesus...hush your mouth!

CLARA

Ain't got much time Mama. We got to get to the next station.

MAMA

(Realization) Oh my lord...you travelin' on the underground! *(Sobering)* I...can't...*(Beat)*
Clara, I'll just be a burden...

CLARA

Mama...

MAMA

...I'm gonna have a baby...

CLARA

That ain't no burden Mama. *(Beat)* What 'bout the Daddy?

MAMA

What about him? I ain't matter to him, and he don't matter to me. But this child Clara? This child matter, just like you matter. *(Beat)* Look at you. So big. All grown up and lookin' just like... Lord knows I been prayin' 'bout freedom long enough, and with God as my witness, I sure dreamt 'bout it. *(Beat. Then moving with energy)* Jack? Pack up that cornbread and salt pork over yonder...oh, and get my skillet too. Clara, roll up my sleepin' pallet for me would you... what else? Reckon I better take my few little clothes with me, so I got something to wear once we get to freedom.

CLARA V/O

Next thing I knew, she grabbed her shawl, and we left North Farm forever. They say that evil travels in a straight line, so we zigzagged our way 'cross Kentucky to a safe house 'bout ninety miles away in Lexington. We kept to the woods, and stayed near water when we could. Few times we changed direction, and headed south to avoid slave catchers. When we finally got to Lexington we was hid by friends of Delia Webster in a secret room. They fed us, gave us better travelin' clothes, and contacted the next station master. After 'bout three, four days, a wagon come with two more "packages" on board to carry all us further north. The five of us was laid out, and packed on the back of the wagon, and covered with blankets. Then hay bales, barrels and such was used to cover our hidin' place. The closer freedom got, the more dangerous it got. The driver couldn't take us but so far, so we had to travel 'bout twenty miles on foot, to get to the Ohio River, and our next conductor.

Clara and her party have been joined by Elise and Henry (the other packages). Daylight will be breaking soon. Mama is lying on the ground, and Elise and Clara are with her. Jack and Henry stand, off away from the women.

ELISE

...my white, daddy don't want me. He don't mind ownin' me, but he ain't gonna claim me, and he don't want nobody else to want me. *(Beat)* Wanna know what I call him in secret?

CLARA

What?

ELISE

Massa Daddy. *(They laugh)*

CLARA

Oooo!

ELISE

He say that man, *(indicating Henry)* ain't no man. That he ain't good enough for me 'cause he a slave, and he too black. He say that 'cause "the taint" don't show in my color, or my hair, that I need to set my sights higher than a common darkie. Funny thing 'bout Massa Daddy is that he don't seem to mind, leavin' his white wife bed, to come lay down with my black Mama.

CLARA

Henry seem like a fine man Elise, and I'm glad to know you both. How long ya'll been married?

ELISE

Slave marriage ain't bound by law. Henry say we get married once we get across the river when we free to get married same as any other.

CLARA

Seem to me, ya'll might need to give some thought to goin' on without us.

ELISE

We 'spose to stay together.

Clara motions Elise away from Mama.

CLARA

I know, but...My Mama not doin' so good, and...she can't travel. If she make it, or she don't, I ain't leavin' her. You and Henry, got a plan, and ya'll should go on ahead and use it. Pretend to be his boss lady. Pretend to be a white lady, like your Daddy's wife. Pretend that your husband is your slave, if it's gonna get you to freedom.

HENRY

What we gonna do?

JACK

Daylight breakin' soon, so we wait 'til dark

HENRY

We already done lost one night of travel, and we so close...

JACK

I know Henry...

HENRY

(Beat) I love that woman over there, and she love me back, but her Daddy wouldn't let us be. He own her, just like he own me, her Mama, her brother, and all the rest. Said I wont good enough for her, and he gonna sell her off in Nawlins, where high yella gals fetch a high price if she don't leave me be. Her Daddy? He ain't...right. He don't look at Elise like a Daddy 'spose to look at his daughter, so we run.

Clara and Elise join the men.

JACK

So, is we agreed?

CLARA

Elise?

ELISE

I feel like I'm bein' split in two. *(Hugs Clara)*

JACK

Henry, proud to know you, but sunrise is comin', and...

Henry shakes Jack's hand.

HENRY

Jack, I'll see you on the other side.

Elise and Henry go to each other, gather their things and leave.

JACK

How is she?

CLARA

Better than last night, The bleeding stopped. I made some more tea like Annie Rae showed me and it seems to be workin'.

JACK

What about the baby?

CLARA

I'm scared Jack. I ain't no doctor...

JACK

We just rest here for a day or two, then we head for the river, and after that Ripley

CLARA

Maybe you shoulda gone with Elise and Henry...

JACK

I ain't leavin' you Clara. You or your Mama. We stay together.

CLARA

What if she don't get no better?

JACK

I ain't leavin'.

MAMA

Clara? You and Jack come here. We too close to freedom, to lose it on account of me. I'd rather die than...

JACK

Ain't gonna be no dyin ' Ma'am.

MAMA

We been here too long already. It's dangerous. You know paterollers bound to be nearby. I can make it. *(she starts to get up and Jack sees something offstage that stuns him)*

JACK

Clara...don't ...move...

Clara and company move to a Shawnee lodge during v/o. A woman, Sally Greyfeather is with Clara and Mama, while Jack is off to the side with her husband Geo Greyfeather.

CLARA V/O

And that's when they found us. Two Shawnee hunters. They saw that Mama was in bad shape, and took us to their camp. There were only a few of them, but the women helped me tend to Mama, and Jack spent his time with the men. We stayed near 'bout, ten days before Mama was well enough to travel.

MAMA

Mighty grateful for the help you give. Don't reckon I can ever thank ya'll for what you done for us. For this baby.

SALLY

The Shawnee believe that when you aid your neighbor, you add to their days as well as your own.

MAMA

Well, me and my family is much obliged. *(Beat)* Even been thinkin' 'bout namin' this baby after you. Sally Greyfeather. *(The chuckle)*

SALLY

I would be honored, but your son might not like the name.

MAMA

(Beat) You think I'm havin' a boy?

SALLY

It's what I believe. He will also be a warrior like your daughter, Clara.

MAMA

(Beat) If you don't mind me askin', how you come to live with the Shawnee?

SALLY

I was captured in a raid as a child. When I came of age, Geo became my husband. Most of his people have been forced west, but he and the others refuse to leave.

MAMA

You have a beautiful family.

SALLY

(She smiles before sobering) I worry though, because everyone is scattered. Geo's people, removed from their land, my people enslaved. What will happen to our people? Our children and grandchildren?

MAMA

You ever thought of goin' north?

SALLY

No. This is my home, and we must stay and preserve the sacred memory.

Mama nods her head in understanding and comforts Sally.

GEO

...where we have dug a den for you in the woods. After nightfall, follow the trail to the river.

JACK

And wait for the lantern signal.

CLARA

Mr. Greyfeather, ya'll risked so much, takin' us in.

JACK

Wish we could find a proper way to thank you.

GEO

Your thanks are in the smiles of the children, my wife's laughter, and what you have brought to this family, which you are a part of now. *(Beat)* So much change for all of us... *(Turning to Jack)* Jack, remember the words of the elders, and use them to guide your steps. You show a braveness that makes me proud to call you brother. *(Turning to Clara)* Little Sister, you are a fierce dreamer, and because of that, you will always be free. Never forget that. *(Speaking to both)* Are you ready?

They nod, or give some sign of affirmation, and cross to Mama and Sally.

CLARA

Mama...it's time...

MAMA

Yeah, I reckon it is. *(Hugging Sally)* Thank you, thank you, thank you. So much...for everything.

SALLY

(Removing necklace, or other piece of jewelry, and placing it on Mama) Here. To protect the little warrior.

Jack and Clara thank/hug Sally as Geo speaks to her.

GEO

I will return by late day. *(Scene shift. The v/o can be performed so that the Greyfeathers can exit and John Parker enters.)*

CLARA V/O

It took us several hours to get to the den that Geo and his brother in law had dug for us,

but it was well hid. We stayed there 'til close to midnight, then we had to walk a few more miles to the river. When we seen the lantern signal, felt like time stopped, and got faster all at once. When the boat finally come ashore, we was met by John Parker hisself, and he carried us right on'cross the Ohio River to his home in Ripley. Maybe it was all in my mind, but once I put my feet on free soil, the ground felt more solid somehow.

JOHN PARKER

Because I know that I am at least equal to any man, I have been called uppity. I am not afraid to use my mind, my fists, or my guns if I am affronted, and I will defend those in my care. I was born to a black mother and a white father, who sold me when I was eight years old. I purchased my freedom ten years later in New Orleans, and helped my first passengers soon thereafter, when I moved to Indiana. I have become more active in my work since living here in Ripley, and will continue this work until I die, because freedom is a right that must be guaranteed to all.

John Parker talks with Clara and company as her v/o begins. He guides them to another stop and exits. The Benedicts enter and welcome them.

CLARA V/O

Hadn't never met no colored man like Mr. Parker before. Had his own foundry business...and smart? Ooh-wee! Found out later that he had his own U.S. patents, but he risked his life, his family and his freedom, helpin' folk like us. Wish I coulda spent more time listenin' to him talk, but we had to keep on goin'. By the time we got to Chillicothe, Ohio, me and Mama had decided that our new last name was gonna be Parker. She even talked 'bout naming the baby Greyfeather Parker, 'cause she say Sally told her she was havin' a boy. A wagon took us from Chillicothe to Columbus, where we stayed with a man by the name of, Fernando Cortez Kelton, and his wife Sophia. We figured we might settle in Ohio, but decided to go further north to put some distance between us and the slave laws, slave states and slave catchers. The station in Marengo, was conducted by a Quaker family name of Benedict.

The Benedicts welcome Clara and company. They exit with Mama during Clara's next v/o.

RUEBEN & ANNA BENEDICT

That of God (Truth) is in everyone
Thee are welcome here (Seed) friend
Pure principle
Plainness in word, dress and deed
That of God within us
Religious Society of (Friends)
Sharing food, a form of communion

All of life is sacred
Every day is the Lord's Day
First day, second day
Third week, fourth
See God as present teacher
All are equal, no curtsies or bows or removing of hats
All are equal, no mister, missus, "your" royal highness
Thee and thou, not you and your
All are equal
Man, woman and child
All are equal
All

CLARA V/O

Rueben and Anna Benedict had twelve youngun's , but they made room for us, and freedom was startin to feel real. Folk treated us kindly and we was able to walk about. I picked up some work sewin', and Mama and Jack was able to work a bit too, and we got paid to do it! Yessir, freedom was startin' to feel mighty fine.

Interior. A safe house at the Alum Creek Settlement in the Benedict home. Jack is alone, and seems to be in deep thought. Clara approaches.

CLARA

Penny for your thoughts

JACK

You feel free Clara?

CLARA

Don't you?

JACK

For a time, when we first got to Ripley I did, but...we kept runnin'. We still runnin'. The soil free, but we ain't. They can come and snatch us back any time they want. Shoot! They come and snatch back free men that wont never no slave, if they want.

CLARA

We ain't got to run no more Jack...

JACK

Fugitive Slave Act, say different.

CLARA

Speak plain, Jack.

JACK

I just...I ain't got no complaints 'bout how the Benedicts treat us. I been able to save a little money, getting' paid for doin' work I used to do for free, but...(Sighing) Clara, seem like...

CLARA

You feel safe here?

JACK

Reckon I feel safe enough Clara, what I don't feel is free.

CLARA

Day before yesterday, Mama woke up, and told me that she feel safe, for the first time she could remember, she feel safe...

JACK

I know you thinkin' 'bout your Ma, and worried 'bout the baby...

CLARA

And I know, that you wanna keep going...

Mama starts to enter the scene, but stops to listen

JACK

I promised not to leave you...not to leave ya'll. I just...I just want to get somewhere...somewhere I can live my life, and have a family. Somewhere I can work, die, and get my proper share, as a free man.

CLARA

How far you plannin' to go Jack Freeman?

JACK

Canada.

CLARA

Winter be settin' in soon...Maybe we can send for Mama after she have the baby.

JACK

I don't expect you to come with me Clara, and your Mama? She need you.

Mama who has been listening enters the scene

MAMA

Reckon I can speak for myself, seeing as how I'm free and all. *(Jack and Clara are startled by her appearance. She goes to Clara first)* Daughter, I know you frettin' over me and this youngun', but we gonna be alright. I could stay here in Marengo, but the two of you is the only family I got, so I go where ya'll go.

Jack and Clara are speechless, and look to one another

JACK

Reckon we stay here then, least 'til the baby come.

MAMA

I done heard the talk, at these meetings same as you two. I even been to a few that you ain't. Folk plannin' on gettin' to Sandusky or Ashtabula; if not Canada before the weather break, and we gonna be with 'em.

CLARA

Mama...

MAMA

But I got a question for you Mr. Freeman...

JACK

Ma'am?

MAMA

What part of Canada? 'Cause I think Chatham, might be a fine place to settle.

Clara looks at her mother in amazement

JACK

Well I...I was thinkin' maybe, Windsor.

Clara's mouth drops open as she looks at Jack

CLARA

Windsor? What about St. Catherine's?

Mama and Jack look at Clara in amazement

CLARA

What? I like the sound of the name.

A moment as they all realize that they have individually been thinking about Canada as the final stop. They laugh and embrace. Music begins. Annie Rae enters wrapped in Clara's quilt as Clara Jack and Mama move upstage. Others who have been guides on this journey enter and touch the quilt/ or wrap themselves in it as the music plays. Then Mama re-enters with her baby, followed by Jack and Clara enter, holding hands; obviously a couple. Clara may even be with child.

CURTAIN

Appendix B

Sweet Honey in the Rock music came from their compact discs, On Sacred Ground, All For Freedom and In This Land.

Music used from the Alan Lomax Collection was found on Southern Journey Volume 1: Voices from the South, and Southern Journey Volume 12: Georgia Sea Islands.

Appendix C

Clara.....	Empress Harrison
Annie Rae/Sally.....	Olisa Enrico
Jack.....	Adriel Hunter
Elijah/Billy/Geo.....	Dallas Tolentino
Cook/Black Woman/Mama.....	Jasmine Coles
Ben/Neighbor/Black Man/John Parker.....	Donnie Joyner
Cleophus/Blue/Henry.....	Emeka Udezulu
Overseer/White Man/Rueben Benedict.....	Drew Sease
Sam/Anna Benedict.....	Sarah Stepahin
White Woman/Elise.....	Melissa Carroll-Jackson

VITA

April A. Jones was born to Alice Laurretta Hannibal and Macon Murray Jones Jr., in Buffalo, NY on November 16, 1962. She attended Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia as a freshman, and graduated from North Carolina Central University in Durham, North Carolina in 1989, with a BA in Theatre. In 1986 she was a stage management intern at the St. Louis Black Repertory, and a directing/stage management intern at Arena Stage in 1989. Jones is an actor, director, playwright and teacher, and member of Actor's Equity Association.

